

E-NETTED on 4/13



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United States Department of State

Washington, D.C. 20520

APR 12 2002

INFORMATION MEMORANDUM  
S/ES *4/12*

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RELEASED IN FULL

TO: The Secretary.

FROM: WHA - Otto J. Reich *COB for*

SUBJECT: Change of Government in Venezuela

Current Situation in Venezuela

- A transitional civilian government now in place is headed by Pedro Carmona Estanga, President of the Association of Venezuelan Chambers of Commerce.
- Carmona was officially sworn in at 1755 EDT on April 12.
- The new government has suspended the supreme court and the legislative assembly, giving temporary legislative powers to the cabinet.
- The new government reinstated the pre-1999 constitution.
- Carmona has promised to hold elections within one year.

Our Response

- On April 12, USOAS PermRep Noriega and I hosted a meeting with representatives of all WHA embassies (except Venezuela).
- I shared with them our understanding of the events of April 11-12 in Caracas, emphasized USG support for the people of Venezuela.
- The ambassadors expressed concern over the process of the change of government in Venezuela and stressed that it must adhere to the rule of law.

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- 2 -

## OAS Response

- OAS Secretary General Cesar Gaviria declined an invitation to the Rio Group meeting in San Jose, Costa Rica in order to deal with the issue in the OAS. He will likely call a Permanent Council Meeting on Saturday, under Article 110 of the OAS Charter.
- Gaviria has called an informal meeting for 1800 tonight, 12 April.
- The Rio Group is focusing on the events in Venezuela. Following this afternoon's meeting, they issued a declaration condemning the interruption of constitutional order and calling upon the OAS to convene a special session under article 20 of the Inter-American Democratic Charter. A copy of the declaration is attached.

In our view, the new government's suspension of the legislative assembly, constitution and court, and the assumption of the presidency without the assembly's approval appear at first impression as a clean break with the constitutional process. These moves open the door to intense international scrutiny of the new government's adherence to democratic principles and may raise legal questions about USG ability to continue some assistance programs and cooperation under the Foreign Assistance Act. The actions of April 12 will require additional legal analysis.

## Attachment:

Tab 1 - Rio Group Declaration regarding Venezuela (in Spanish)

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